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Transforming Terror: Remembering the Soul of the World
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U.S. Nuclear Terrorism

Long after the ending of the Cold War, the chance that some nuclear weapons will kill masses of innocent humans somewhere, before very long, may well be higher than it was before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

One phase of the Nuclear Age, the period of superpower arms race and confrontation, has indeed come to a close (though the possibility of all-out, omnicidal exchange of alert forces triggered by a false alarm remains, inexcusably, well above zero). But another dangerous phase now looms, the era of nuclear proliferation and with it, an increased likelihood of regional nuclear wars, accidents, and nuclear terrorism. And the latter prospect is posed not just by "rogue" states or sub-state terrorists but by the United States, which has both led by example for sixty years of making nuclear first-use threats that amount to terrorism and may well be the first or among the first to carry out such threats.

Averting catastrophe—not only the spread of weapons but their lethal use—will require major shifts in attitude and policy in every one of the nuclear weapon states, declared and undeclared. But such change is undoubtedly most needed, and must come first, in the United States and Russia

With each month and year that nuclear weapons states maintain large nuclear arsenals, postpone ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and sustain nuclear policies that suggest that such weapons convey major-power status and are useful for political and military purposes, other nations can only conclude that acquiring and in some circumstances using nuclear weapons may well be in their national interest.

In the United States alone, a whole set of policies persist that have long tended to *encourage* proliferation.

Perhaps most dangerously, such potential proliferators are led by past and present American doctrine and behavior to consider—among the possible, acceptable and valuable uses of nuclear weapons—the employment of nuclear first-use threats: i.e., the "option" of threatening to initiate nuclear attacks, and if necessary of carrying out such threats. Precisely that example is set by repeated statements over the last year by President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, echoed by leading members of Congress, that "all options are on the table" in their determination to prevent Iranian nuclear weapons capability. Such threats legitimize the prospect of first-use by any nuclear weapons state, and they have the perverse effect of challenging states without nuclear weapons, including Iran, to acquire them: to be able to deter or preempt nuclear attack, or to threaten first-use on their own.

Years after the former members of the Warsaw Pact, including Russia, began asking to be admitted to NATO, and after China has acquired most-favored-nation status, the United States still refuses to adopt a policy of "no-first-use." This means that the United States refuses to make a commitment to never under any circumstance initiate a nuclear attack. This is also true of Britain, France and now Russia, which abandoned its no-first-use doctrine in late 1993, citing the United States-NATO example and reasoning in doing so.

This is not only a matter of words, as some suppose. Despite sensible moves on both sides beginning in late 1991 to remove tactical nuclear weapons from the surface navy and from ground units—responding to realistic fears in both leaderships of "loose nukes" in the Soviet Union—both states continue to deploy sizeable numbers of tactical weapons on air bases and still larger numbers in reserve storage. Since virtually all of these weapons are vulnerable to nuclear attack, they cannot be used for deterrence; they are weapons *only* for first-use or for use against non-nuclear opponents.

So long as these continue to be components of the nuclear arsenals of both the United States and Russia, even after their own overarching confrontation has ended, there is simply no logical argument for denying either the legitimacy or reasonableness of other countries acquiring nuclear arsenals sized and shaped to the same ends. Accordingly when in May 1990, a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir was plausibly feared by US officials, the United States was not in a position to invoke an internationally-accepted norm against Pakistan's tacit first-use threats, since Pakistan was so clearly imitating US and NATO behavior.

U.S. Nuclear Weapons Use

Later in 1990, after Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait, not one of the four nuclear states militarily arrayed against Iraq in the Gulf War—the United States, Britain, France and Israel—refrained from tacit threats to initiate nuclear attacks under some circumstances. Under public questioning, high US and other Allied officials pointedly refused to rule out the possible first-use of nuclear weapons against Iraq: in particular, if the Iraqis used chemical weapons extensively, which was regarded as highly possible. Thus, nuclear weapons *were used* as a threat against a non-nuclear opponent during the Gulf War.

By the same token, contrary to the belief of most Americans that US nuclear weapons have never been used in the fifty years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, American Presidents have employed nuclear threats over a dozen times, generally in secret from the US public, in crises and limited wars in Indochina, East Asia, Berlin, Cuba and the Middle East. [1] The Soviet Union, Israel, and Pakistan have used nuclear weapons in the same way.

[1] See Daniel Ellsberg, "Call to Mutiny," Introduction to Protest and Survive, ed. E.P. Thompson and Dan Smith (Monthly Review Press, 1981): http://www.ellsberg.net/content/view/16/32/
For a more recent list of threats, see "U.S. Nuclear threats: Then and now," Robert S. Norris and Hans M Kristensen, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, September/October 200, pp. 69-71: http://www.thebulletin.org/print_nn.php?art_ofn=so06norris

In each of these cases, nuclear weapons were *used* in the exact sense in which a gun is used when it is pointed at someone's head in a confrontation, whether or not the trigger is pulled. To get one's way without having to pull the trigger is a major reason for acquiring the gun and, often, for brandishing it.

In this regard, the Pentagon concluded the tactic was successfully used in the Gulf War. Saddam Hussein did not, after all, use the chemical weapons he then possessed—some on alert missiles-- either against Allied troops or against Israel. Fear of Israeli nuclear reprisal may have been an especially effective deterrent. But this success, if true, came at a high price. The message that the United States and its allies regarded such threats both as legitimate and as successful was not lost on potential proliferators, who could imagine themselves either as receiving or as imitating such threats themselves in the future.

Yet another spur to proliferation was the accompanying thought, among Third World observers, that Iraq might have been spared both these nuclear threats and the heavy conventional bombing it received if Saddam Hussein's efforts to acquire a nuclear weapon had already been successful. That inference became inescapable after 2003, with the dramatic difference in the US responses to a supposed nuclear weapons program in Iraq and an actual successful one in North Korea. (A conventional or nuclear US attack in the near future on a yet-non-nuclear Iran would underline that point once again for the rest of the world).

Nuclear Insanity

"Insane" is not too strong a word for arguments that occupy planners in the Pentagon and otherwise-serious arms control analysts in favor of maintaining thousands of thermonuclear warheads in the US arsenal—hence thousands in Russia—in a world where neither any longer has a superpower adversary. After two generations of a strategic nuclear arms race that was the clearest example in human history of a social process psychotically divorced from reality or an urge to survive, such advisors have clearly lost any conception of what a nuclear bomb is or does.

Few Americans are aware of the elementary fact that every thermonuclear fusion weapon, or H-bomb—which comprise all of our strategic arsenal, still over 6,000 warheads—requires a Nagasaki-type fission warhead, or A-bomb, to set it off.

The earliest thermonuclear blasts released 1,000 times the explosive power of the A-bomb detonator that triggered it, which was in turn 2,000 times more powerful than the largest "blockbuster" of World War II. The latter destroyed a city block with ten tons of TNT. The second fusion explosion, in February 1954, had a yield equivalent to 15 million tons of TNT, over seven times greater than the tonnage of all the bombs dropped by the United States in World War II, including the A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That single bomb—the first test of a droppable H-bomb—had greater

explosive power than that of all the shells and bombs together in all the wars of human history.

It is in that unearthly light that bomb designer Herbert York, the first director of Livermore Nuclear Weapons Laboratory and later President Carter's test ban negotiator, gave an unfamiliar but plausible answer to the Cold War question: How many survivable, deliverable nuclear warheads would it take to deter an adversary rational enough to be deterred at all? York's answer was: "Somewhere in the range of 1, 10, or 100"; and, he conjectured, "I think it is closer to 1 than it is to 100."

Meanwhile, the United States arsenal—10,000 warheads, nearly 6000 operational—is *one hundred times* the maximum suggested by York. The Russian stockpile--16,000 warheads, over 7000 operational, is even larger. Even after reductions currently agreed under the current Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty by 2012, the operational warheads alone--1700-2200 "operationally deployable" warheads,for each (apart from the much larger number of inactive/reserve weapons "on the shelf")—will be ten to twenty times the York levels.[2] And they will still be larger in 2013 and beyond than the arsenals that either deployed in 1968, when they signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

By their behavior, the two nuclear superpowers have been saying to every non-nuclear-weapon state over the forty years since then: "You don't need a single nuclear weapon ever. We need thousands indefinitely. And we feel free to use them, by threatening them, whenever we choose, to gain a stronger hand in diplomatic 'negotiations.'"

Without an effective international norm against both acquisition and threat/use of nuclear weapons, there cannot be an adequate basis for consensual, coordinated international action to prevent such acquisition or use, including intrusive inspection "any time any place," with comprehensive sanctions against violators of the norm. And such norms have to be universal: one set of rules for everyone.

It is urgent for the nuclear-weapon states to acknowledge the reality that they have been denying and the non-nuclear-weapon states have been proclaiming for almost forty years: that effective non-proliferation is inescapably linked to nuclear disarmament and to immediate changes in threat-policy.

It is all or none. Eventually—indeed, very shortly--either all nations forego the right to possess and threaten others with nuclear weapons or every nation will claim that right, and actual possession and use will be very widespread.

2 All estimates, except for Israel, from Cirincione, *op. cit.*, Table 5.5, p. 98.

No First Use

Few Americans in or out of government are aware of the extent to which the United States and NATO first-use doctrine has always isolated the United States and its Western allies morally and politically from world opinion. Nor are they familiar with the sharpness of the language used by majorities in the UN General Assembly in resolutions condemning the policies on which NATO has long based its planning.

UN Resolution 36/100, the Declaration on the Prevention of Nuclear Catastrophe, was adopted on December 9, 1981. It declares in its Preamble:

> "Any doctrine allowing the first use of nuclear weapons and any actions pushing the world toward a catastrophe are incompatible with human moral standards and the lofty ideals of the UN."

The body of the UN Resolution 36/100 declares:

> "States and statesmen that resort first to nuclear weapons will be committing the gravest crime against humanity. There will never be any justification or pardon for statesmen who take the decision to be the first to use nuclear weapons."

Eighty two nations voted in favor of this declaration. Forty-one (under heavy pressure from the U.S.) abstained; 19 opposed it, including the United States and most NATO member nations.

That the dissenters were allies of the United States is no coincidence. The first-use doctrine denounced here in such stark terms underlies the basic strategic concept of NATO, devised and promoted by the United States from the early fifties to the present. NATO plans and preparations not only "allow" first use of nuclear weapons, if necessary to defeat an overwhelming attack; they promise it. They always have, and they still do.

This remains true despite the fact that the possibility of an overwhelming conventional attack against NATO no longer exists. Only China, of the five declared nuclear-weapon states, has made the simple, unqualified commitment that it would never be the first to use a nuclear weapon, and that it would not use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear-weapon state.

With an era of widespread proliferation threatening, it should be unmistakably clear that accepting UN resolution 36/100 as a universal principle would be in the best interests of the United States and the rest of the world. The United States and its allies would join, at last, in a moral judgment that is already asserted by the majority of governments of the world.

The moral basis of President George W. Bush's "global war on terror," is his denunciation of terrorism in all its forms and in all circumstances where terrorism is

defined as the deliberate slaughter of noncombatants—"innocent" civilians, children and infants, the old and the sick.

The destruction of the World Trade Center buildings with their inhabitants on September 11, 2001 was rightly recognized as a terrorist action, and condemned as mass murder, by most of the world.

But in contrast, neither Bush, nor most Americans have ever recognized as terrorist in precisely the same sense the firestorms caused deliberately by RAF firebombing of Hamburg and Dresden or U.S. firebombing of Tokyo and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These deliberate massacres of civilians, though not prosecuted after World War II like the Japanese slaughter at Nanking, were by any prior or reasonable criteria war crimes, wartime terrorism, crimes against humanity.

Speaking personally, I have always shared President Bush's blanket condemnation, under all circumstances, of terrorism: unjust means, as I see it, even in a just cause, whether World War II or a revolutionary struggle. But I would apply that across the board, certainly including the indiscriminate area bombing by the U.S. and British during World War II— what the RAF accurately called "terror bombing,—and necessarily to almost any use of nuclear weapons.

Just like the bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki —which would be considered, in terms of scale, "tactical" nuclear weapons today —any attack by a single tactical nuclear weapon near a densely populated area would kill tens to hundreds of thousands of noncombatants, as those did.

Virtually any threat of first-use of a nuclear weapon is a terrorist threat. (Exceptions might be tactical anti-submarine weapons underwater, or weapons in space, or air-bursts against military targets in a desert: but even these would be highly likely to lead to less discriminating exchanges). Any nation making such threats—that means the United States and its allies, including Israel, along with Russia, Pakistan and India—is a terrorist nation.

But the same is true of threats of nuclear retaliation to nuclear attack: and the planned scale of slaughter of civilians is vastly greater, by a hundred times or more. To threaten and prepare retaliatory second-use (or preemption of imminent attack)—above all with thermonuclear weapons, like the five permanent members of the Security Council-- is to threaten counter-terrorism on the largest of scales: retaliatory genocide. To possess a nuclear weapon is to be a terrorist nation

To reject terrorism—as we should, as moral beings---is to reject the possession of nuclear weapons. If a large fraction of the thousands of thermonuclear warheads on alert in the U.S. or Russia were launched, the hundreds of millions of deaths caused (half or more killed by fallout in "neutral" countries or their own allies) would transcend the

conventional concept of genocide. The slaughter of innocents would be multi-genocide: or omnicide, if it resulted in global nuclear winter.

The elimination of nuclear weapons, of nuclear terrorism, will have to be accomplished by multilateral collaboration. But it must be accomplished. To recover fundamental moral bearings, as well as to preserve life and civilization, the United States, Russia, Britain, France, China, Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea must cease to be terrorist states.

The challenge especially to citizens of these states, in company with others around the world, is to bring their national policies into line—overcoming the resistance of their present national leaderships—with fundamental morality, and thus with the global goal, the species-task, defined by the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his inaugural address to the NPT Review and Extension Conference in May 1995:

"The most safe, sure and swift way to deal with the threat of nuclear arms is to do away with them in every regard. This should be our vision of the future. No more testing. No more production. No more sales or transfer. Reduction and destruction of all nuclear weapons and the means to make them should be humanity's great cause."